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STUDIES IN POLITICAL AREAS. III.

THE SMALL POLITICAL AREA.

THE smaller the area, the more rapid is the progress of its history. A limited territory is more easily mastered; it develops industrially and politically at an earlier period. The high degree of exploitation practiced in it produces for a time more of the various elements of power—men and wealth—than a large area does. Individuals, classes, parties, races, are brought nearer together; the adjustment of differences is often hastened by force, and the development of the whole thereby promoted. The history of the small area is, therefore, that of a country in the lead, with a capacity to impart a powerful stimulus to others. Thus it happens that limited regions have, for short periods, been more influential historically than large ones. This is the meaning of Johann von Müller's saying: "Most great things have been accomplished by small nations or by men of little strength and great mind." The districts limited by nature assume the leadership for a large region; this function then gradually passes over to states of larger extent, with slower but more lasting progress, in proportion as their greater resources are developed. Thus we see the general advance of mankind from smaller to larger areas repeating itself, and consequently the types peculiar to restriction and expansion regularly following one another. After Greece came Italy; after Denmark, the German coast, with the Hanse towns and the Prussian colonies of the Teutonic knights; after Portugal, Spain; after the Netherlands, England; after Brandenburg, Prussia; after the West Indies, North America; after New England, the United States; after Bengal, India; and after Cape Colony, English South Africa, reaching to the Zambezi. We speak of the great political influence which it has fallen to the lot of small states to wield, and we overlook the fact that this has often become prominent just in the transition from the narrow area of prepa-

ration to the broader one of expansion. From the time there has been a history telling about different tribes and nations on terms of rivalry or acting and reacting upon one another, one has always had the lead. It opens the way, sets the example, and exercises thereby a powerful influence in political, intellectual, or economic matters, the first two more often from an economic basis. Such a people always operates with concentrated strength from a small territory upon outside aims. England offers in the present the most stupendous example of the kind, and that with results which cannot yet be measured.

The progress of historical events enacted within close, confined limits gives the impression of something finished, which even appeals to the æsthetic sense in comparison with movements losing themselves in the vast perspective. The more thorough comprehension and utilization of natural conditions here necessary cause the historical individuality to mature earlier and to reveal more sharply drawn features. In a restricted environment, moreover, man himself appears great as a molder of history. There is a certain attractive definiteness in the great history of little states, from Greece and Rome to Great Britain. This is undoubtedly what Spörer meant when he said that "the process of development of the ancient mind had something of the clearness and distinctness of an artistic composition."¹ This is particularly true of the history of the city-states; they, indeed, are the greatest examples of historical greatness in ancient times. Their importance, as well as the interest which they arouse in us, is altogether out of proportion to their area, but not to the closeness of the connection existing between the land and its people participating as one body in all the movements of its history.

The very thing which limits and hems in a region often affords to the life forcing its way upward in narrow confinement the possibility of expansion and a field of activity in distant parts. It is true that in the Mediterranean countries the limited character of the area, determined by land and climate, tended to

¹ SPÖRER'S notice of C. CURTIUS' "Topographie von Athen," *Geographische Mitteilungen*, 1869, p. 46.

concentrate and intensify everything. This was the case in Egypt and Mesopotamia, just as in Greece and Rome; but the latter stood in connection with a broad sphere of action in the numerous seas to which they had access through their thousand bays, and on which they first secured proper play for their concentrated energies. We find the same two conditions and the same result in Carthage as in Lübeck, Genoa, and Venice. Denmark also, the Netherlands, and Portugal show this same combination of complete isolation in their older, internal development, with all the advantages of transoceanic expansion. In the continuous union of the two, in consequence of which the widest spreading of the people could not break the wholesome bonds of an intense political personality, lies the unrivaled greatness of the British empire. Small inland states, also, press toward these fields of greater activity, which, however, are open to them only through some connection with maritime powers, as in the Hanse towns and in Augsburg's relation with Spain in Venezuela, or by a non-political participation in the competition of foreign trade, such as Switzerland has assumed with great success. The fact that Switzerland and Belgium afford the most fruitful soil in Europe today for international dreams and plans, not seldom Utopian in their character, reminds us of the saying: "The Swiss must have a loophole."¹

A number of the effects of these naturally isolated regions result simply from their limited area, and therefore characterize islands also, inasmuch as in them the limitation of the territory is absolute. While the population of a small country can spread beyond its boundaries as far as the habitable land extends, in islands all habitation ceases at their shores. This condition makes for that rapidly increasing density of population which we have characterized in our *Anthropogeographie* as their "early statistic maturity," with the immediate consequences, emigration, colonization, and commerce. Upon islands, therefore, the question of space acquires particular importance² as an element in economic and political affairs; their nature and form lead

¹ HILTY, *Vorlesungen über die Politik der Eidgenossenschaft*, 1875, p. 69.

² See *Anthropogeographie*, II, pp. 237 *et seq.*

islands to a careful use of their scant territory, their position to the enjoyment of unlimited space, and out of the combination of these two impulses issue the greatest historical results.

The other great European powers which aim at the same goal as England have been very slow, in the course of their development, to make the most of their greater area—the one advantage which the little island country could never contest with them. Meantime, the latter has continued to exercise the influence which emanates from a more mature, advanced people. A great part of the development of Europe has consisted in the assimilation of English ideas and institutions, and by reason of the immense start which this small land has in the race, this process will continue to endure for a long time yet, especially since English influence is already beginning to make itself felt by way of North America, for example, from non-European countries also. Even yet, one-half the total merchant fleet of all maritime states carries the English flag, and England's exports are equal to those of Germany and France together, although its area is only one-third as large. For all the other European states, naturally, one of the most important questions is, how far they may follow the course of this progressive country, which is by its geographical character so much more free and independent, without disregarding their own peculiar conditions. Consider how far Japan has outstripped China and Corea; and this has happened not merely since the invasion of European and American influence, which could penetrate the smaller country more easily and pervade it quickly, whereas in the tenfold population of China it could not reach beyond the borders: even before, Japan had of herself modified and further developed the elements of Chinese civilization which had come over to her chiefly by way of Corea, and since the seventeenth century she had already adopted very gradually the acquisitions of European culture, mainly under the guidance of Holland. In consequence, she was far ahead of China even before the great turning-point of 1853. San Domingo and Cuba successively progressed, not only beyond the other West India islands, but all Central America. On the eve of the French Revolution, San

Domingo's flourishing condition stood without a parallel in colonial history. The leading position then assumed in turn by Cuba would have been more lasting, had it not been for the competition offered by the immense area of the United States, upon which Cuba is becoming more and more dependent.

The wholesome limitation of a country in the first stages of its growth need not be caused necessarily by the sea. In the New England states this function was performed by mountains and forests, which were inhabited by hostile Indian tribes. Only a hundred years ago there lay in Vermont and Maine a "young" West and North for the old New England states—Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire. They too, therefore, had the advantage of developing inside narrow boundaries and with a broad horizon. In the same way the mountains of Spain forced the Moors into a few favored regions, and in consequence gave rise to dense populations, large cities, and lasting traces. In Russia, where Islam was spread out over a territory three times as big, a sparse population, small towns, and no monument of any significance are the result.

There are political aims which require only a minimum of space for their achievement. Rome proved that a great empire could grow out of the district of a city, and that it would, therefore, be idle to designate a minimum area for a state. A coal-ing station can be very important, and yet it is always very small. St. Helena is only forty-seven square miles in area, but has great political importance in consequence of its position in the south Atlantic, which is so poor in islands, twelve hundred miles from the African and twenty-two hundred from the South American coast. This importance has belonged to it from the seventeenth century, when it was the main stopping point for the Dutch between Holland and Java, and has only been diminished by the transfer of the East India route to the Suez canal. A trading people, in founding cities and colonies, does not in the beginning aim at territorial possession, but it only wants a base here and there for maritime commerce and the control of the sea. Even the greatest colonies of the present time have developed out of narrow strips of shore, like the half mile along

the rivers and coasts in Sierra Leone to which England, in the absence of rivalry, has limited her expansion only since 1883. The Phœnician and Greek colonial cities sought the spring of political power, not in territory, but in wealth. Founded as they were by emigration, further migration beyond the seas was to them more natural as the last political resource in case of increase of population than expansion over the land. How slight was the bond that held them to the soil is shown by the vast scheme of Bias of Priene to transplant the Greek settlements of Asia Minor to Sardinia in the western Mediterranean. There lies a contrast found throughout universal history in this rapid expansion over a thousand limited areas, all of which taken together could not make one large, enduring state, and the slow, onward, swelling inner colonization of the great powers in the neighboring continents of Africa and Asia.

The matter of area grows still more limited in the case of political possessions which have, as it were, only a symbolic value, and in many cases are no longer to be regarded as political realities. The *loges* or factories which the French have retained according to the treaty of 1787 upon English soil in India, in addition to the five acknowledged remnants of their empire, at Jugdia, Patna, Dakka, Cossimbasar, and elsewhere, have never been made use of by the French in the sense in which the treaty intended—that is, for trade under the French flag; and nevertheless, in spite of all offers on the part of the English, they have never been relinquished. The small islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon (area, ninety-one square miles) off the coast of New Foundland hold a similar position, although they are of considerable commercial value.

Phases of development which according to their nature are limited find the most favorable environment in contracted areas. For that primitive stage of political development in which one clan holds itself apart from another and each forms a small community for itself, mountains and forests encourage the inclination toward restriction of territory. But from the open plains, which do not favor this tendency, state-making on a larger scale penetrates into these retreats. The family element in the feeling of nation-

ality is from its nature limited in point of extent, and its development is, therefore, promoted by an isolated environment. The Denmark of the thirteenth century, the Swiss Federation of the fourteenth, and the Netherlands of the sixteenth were far ahead of their great neighbors in point of national self-consciousness. A small people preserves its peculiar character in isolation. The Jews were influenced, to be sure, by the people of Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia; but they were few enough in number to retain their distinguishing stamp. Too small to be politically eradicated, they grew up from political weakness to intellectual and spiritual independence. The fate of the Saxons in Siebenbürgen is in its fundamental features and conditions similar.

Even when a tribe has gained possession of a much broader region, still it always tends to restrain efforts directed at more extensive absorption of territory. The growth of the state always becomes in time a struggle with the tendency toward tribal segregation, and the conflicts between national and economic interests are the most unavoidable of all. In this century, notable for the formation of great states, even in western and eastern Europe we have seen states splitting up for reasons of nationality or national religion, but without doubt only temporarily. Higher civilization, to be sure, through the cultivation of the traditions and intellectual treasures stored up in language, causes a sharper separation of peoples, each of which tries to develop that which is most peculiar to itself; but at the same time, civilization creates for them a broader field through commerce and political expansion. Herein lies an antagonistic principle which is working disruptions in every civilized people of the present time, but which seems to be allayed everywhere by the superior influence of greater space, and to this result again trades more than anything else has contributed. The language of a people which enjoys political and economic supremacy forces itself not simply on subjected races. We see this process going on in all directions and on the largest scale in North America, where English has attained a universal sway in intellectual, economic, and political matters. This has been promoted, to be sure, by political conditions, but in general it has developed independently

by reason of the superiority of English civilization. The result is the wholesome condition of parallel growth in expansion of nationality and extension of political sway.

The rapid course of the active life of a people dwelling in a small territory, with its often brilliant features, early leads to old age, and very often to a complete decay of its political importance, ending in a historical disappearance, as in the case of Macedon after its third Roman war, or in that of the Greek states when they were absorbed by Rome. In a narrow area the people become too numerous; they interfere with one another, they irritate, fight, and wear out one another, unless colonization makes more room for them. The city-states are the classic ground of civil strife, which ended in emigration or expulsion. Without imports from other regions, they grow poor from an increase of population out of proportion to their area; with it, they easily grow dependent upon outside countries, and not unfrequently is this the case when, through supplies from subject colonies, their own freshness and energy are paralyzed, as a national life, at any rate, is prone to become without the new tasks which belong to large territories. An intellectual impoverishment becomes unavoidable in a contracted mental horizon, even in the midst of apparently inexhaustible wealth. We find this even in the classical literatures which "knew and recognized only themselves" (Saint-Beuve), where the limited range of their imaginations is reflected in the use of the same ever-recurring figures from nature, history, and mythology, and in their adherence to a few models.

In a limited area rulers and peoples change rapidly, early finish the course of their lives. Consider in how many hands Sicily has been, and how the different nationalities have stamped upon it the mark of their presence and deeper influence. In Greece, the way the most widely different tribes crowded in and over one another confuses our understanding of its history, which, also, suffers from an excess of independent phases of development, in part brilliant, but always entirely too limited in point of territorial extent. Everything, on the other hand, which retards the quick rate of these life-processes of nations

keeps a state young. From their very nature the Mediterranean countries had to grow old earlier, just as they were earlier to be settled and to reach their zenith. The damp swamp and forest regions of the North, on the contrary, remained younger so long as they could offer to their inhabitants new fields for expansion.

The purely political effects of a narrow territorial environment long continued are embraced in the term "political provincialism" (*Kleinstaaterei*). No one has analyzed this quality more clearly than Niebuhr where he gives the history of the fall of Achaia: in substance he says that the nation enjoyed prosperity without opportunity for exercising its powers, and that this prosperity gave rise to moral degeneration. Such a condition finds a corrective when smaller states stand in intimate relations with large ones of the same nationality; but when they continue their isolated existences, independent of one another, and have no activity within themselves, all virility and worth necessarily die out, and a wretched local vanity appears. Great states call forth stirring emotions, peculiarly their own, which keep our feelings alive and ourselves busied, while in small states passion wastes itself upon paltry interests.¹

As a concomitant of this dull uniformity of interests among the inhabitants of a confined area we would mention, also, the monotony of aims and activities which tends to drag down to the common level everything preëminent, and wherever possible to obliterate it. The smaller a political territory is, so much the more monotonous is its physical character. Varied land forms, classes of vegetable life, and climatic conditions involve, as a rule, wide areas. In a mountain range, therefore, or a plain, or a forest or prairie region, or in one climatic zone, there are several, or, in the beginning, even numerous political districts which are naturally of the same or like character; just for that reason they have little to exchange with one another, and are not in a position to exert reciprocally much influence. Moreover, the similarity in the resources and employments of the people works toward the same result.

¹ *Vorlesungen über ältere Geschichte*, edited by M. NIEBUHR, 1851, III, p. 523.

From numerous small circles of existence, therefore, there would always result a monotonous totality, capable of only slight variations, even if the social, economic, and political inertia did not become more pronounced with the narrowness of the horizon and their attachment to a soil so limited that it even fails to provide sufficiently for the simplest conditions of an independent life. The success of the Greek colonies in Asia Minor was only passing, because they ignored the smallness of its basis. With the slight exception of Chios and Lesbos, they took no permanent hold upon the mainland, suffered the interior of Asia Minor to loom up before them as a distant world, and in time of political danger sought protection from the mother country; hence their almost quite passive attitude in the midst of great historical events. The principality of Liechtenstein in 1866 fell, so to speak, out of the hands of Germany into those of Austria, without being able to have any voice in the matter one way or the other. Moreover, no necessity was once felt of making her any explanation of this change. Hermann Wagner wrote in 1869: "The principality of Liechtenstein can properly no longer have a place in the group of German states. It is a sort of appendix of the Austrian monarchy, in the dominion of which it lies."^{*} The history of the German imperial cities, nay more, of the whole of the old empire, affords similar examples in abundance. Their want of capacity for independence leaves its stamp in these same uncertain relations peculiar to little countries which are under two masters. This passive attitude comes from the consciousness of insufficient means; we find it, also, in medium powers. The neutrality of Switzerland, Belgium, and Luxemburg can be traced back to this cause, as also the withdrawal of many powers from great colonial undertakings. In 1871 the Netherlands gave up their possessions on the coast of Guinea because the unhealthy climate cost them too many men; and they feared the difficulties of wars with the natives, for which they would have had to use the troops intended for the Indies. This resignation forms a marked contrast to the

^{*} HERMANN WAGNER, *Der deutsche Zollverein und die Freihafengebiete Deutschlands*, 1869.

contemporaneous tendency toward expansion which is making itself felt on the part of all the larger states of Europe.

The greatest concentration of political forces is reached in cities, for in them space is eliminated out of the list of political obstructions ; hence they show, with stormy adjustment of internal differences, the most rapid development to centers of power, towering far above the wide domain beneath them. The phases of intellectual progress which find their best conditions in the closely associated activities of many people are characteristic of such foci in particular. The transition from the mythological to the scientific age—an epoch in the history of mankind—was accomplished first in small Greek colonial towns, thriving by their trade on new soil, and with limited space. Commerce, which, according to its nature, promotes the development of such places of preëminence or seeks its support in them, favors this early maturity, depositing in it at the same time the never-failing seeds of decay. So long as there have been great cities, they have outstripped their countries in good and evil. The rôle of Paris in the history of revolutions is nothing new. To be sure, the quick tempo of political changes in France was due in part to the national character, but also in part to the lack of the obstructions afforded by mere distance in the twenty-nine square miles of the capital, Paris. A great number of the famous Italian and German trading towns of the Middle Ages, with the expansion of their commerce, rapidly attained the size and population at which they then remained for five hundred years. Lübeck grew with the rapidity of a New York or Chicago. After Henry the Lion had changed it from a provincial town of Holstein to the chief port of his duchy, it stood for a hundred years at the top of the North German cities, and only all-powerful Cologne could be compared with it. In regard to the Hanse towns, Dietrich Schäfer advances the supposition that, in the first century after they were founded, in most cases they already embraced the area which they then retained, till in the present time the totally different phenomenon of the universal growth of population brought to them also an increase. We can, therefore, speak of a development centuries ahead of its time. And

what is particularly noteworthy in the matter, the towns of the Baltic most favored in geographical position, Stettin, Danzig, and Königsberg, advanced in that first growth more slowly; only, however, to stop the process later and to resume it again earlier. In the first half of the fourteenth century the largest cities of the Baltic at that time, Lübeck and Danzig, may be estimated to have had forty thousand inhabitants each.¹ We must imagine the rapid development of the great cities of antiquity on this order. Australia affords the best examples of the kind in present times, for there the peripheral character of all colonial development is accentuated by the nature of the country, which concentrates all the productive industries on anything like a large scale, especially the cultivation of wheat and sugar cane, also sheep raising and gold mining, in effect upon a narrow strip of coast averaging about one hundred and eighty-five miles in breadth. Hence we find cities like Sydney, with 383,000, and Melbourne, with 491,000 inhabitants (1891), whose magnificence forms a sharp contrast to the barrenness and monotony of the rural districts, with their mere beginnings of civilization. The hypertrophic development of the young city of Brisbane (1891, population 94,000) makes itself felt in the separatist tendency of North Queensland, as in the influence of social parties upon the course of politics in New South Wales and Victoria.

The concentration of all political organization in the city arose first out of a matter of space, namely, out of the difficulty of exercising control over wide areas. It is to be found in the Mediterranean more than anywhere else—among Phœnicians, Greeks, Romans, and later among the Italians, for, as Freeman says, mediæval Italy with its city-states is “a living repetition of the political history of ancient Greece.” This fact is intimately connected with the character of the country, where the moisture and fertile soil are scattered, often only oasis-like here and there, so that the settlements in general are less numerous than elsewhere, less evenly distributed, though in individual cases larger and more like cities. In consequence, the cities attach them-

¹ See the criticism of these figures in SCHÄFER's *Die Hansestädte*, pp. 219 *et seq.*

selves more closely to one another, and also to the soil and the coast, and then only upon the sea do they find the expansion and increase of wealth which the nature of the land denied them.

Narrow territories bring into the foreground the question of land, or, in other words, the question of space, in consequence of attention's being unavoidably directed to the relation of area to population. The question arises early, therefore, on islands and in other confined regions. They soon lead either to emigration—voluntary or compulsory—and colonization, for which little Thera, as founder of Cyrene, is typical; or to resistance to unfair division of the land, as in the case of England, where, as early as the sixteenth century, protest was made against the conversion of the commons into inclosed pastures; or finally to the restriction of the natural increase of population. Malthus, in his *Essay on Population*, calls attention to the prevalence among island peoples of customs designed to act as a check to such increase. Moreover, it is not an accident that the book which treated this phenomenon as a scientific problem appeared in an island country; there even today we meet such facts as that the Scotch islands all taken together constitute the single larger region in Scotland where the number of the inhabitants has diminished. All the evils of a redundant population appear in accentuated form in contracted areas, and especially the fundamental evil, the low value put upon human life, which leads to all kinds of desolation; for this the islands of Polynesia and Melanesia afford numerous examples. While in big countries, and particularly in colonies, the increased value of every human being promotes political freedom, there it is hampered by the depreciated value of the masses. All checks to increase of population have an incalculably far-reaching effect; they prevent any influx of men and capital, and, by invading the natural course of increase, injure the health and morality of the community, and, in general, place the future of the people on too narrow a basis. This isolation, however, from the nature of things, cannot be lasting, and as soon as it is broken through, the people, whose progress has been arrested, are exposed in consequence

to the greatest, oftentimes most violent, changes. The rapid disappearance of the Guiana Indians, Caribs, and Tasmanians illustrates the extreme effect of this. The population of the Libyan oases¹ is on the road to the same end; as the increase is artificially checked, the negro threatens to become the dominant element, causing a substitution of race such as has already taken place in Jamaica and other small islands of the West Indies, or, in times for us prehistoric, upon the islands of Melanesia form the spread of settlers from Polynesia and Micronesia.²

FRIEDRICH RATZEL.

(Translated by Ellen C. Semple.)

¹ G. ROHLFS, in the *Geographische Mitteilungen*, p. 447, 1860: "The importation of negroes goes on continually; and since neither the Berbers nor Arabs receive new white elements, as was formerly the case, through Christian slaves, it can easily be foreseen that in a given time, conditions remaining the same, Berbers and Arabs will be absorbed by the black population."

² Chapters I and II in this series appeared in this JOURNAL, November, 1897 and January, 1898.